

Jacques GAILLOT. Testimony of Jean-François BERJONNEAU

Jacques GAILLOT sometimes said "If there was only one priest left in the diocese, I would appoint him prison chaplain. It was a priority for him.

It was there that he lived this evangelical preference for the lost sheep.

It was there that he put into practice this audacity of Christ which consists in leaving the 99 sheep of the fold to go in search of the one who has lost his way on hazardous paths.

And he accepted that I assume the ministry of vicar general while being prison chaplain so as not to lose the relationship with the excluded.

Similarly, he then chose Roland DOLLÉ as vicar general in connection with his ministry as chaplain of the psychiatric hospital.

For him prison was the place where the Church could be in direct contact with the cry of the excluded, the marginalized, the "battered by existence" as Abbé Pierre said.

And he let himself be touched by these cries.

And he never stopped showing them their dignity despite their heavy past

We have lived a beautiful partnership in this ministry which consists in being witnesses of hope to those who lack it so much and who sometimes think that they no longer have a future.

Of course, he came to celebrate Mass on major holidays with this intramural parish.

And we met in the morning before leaving for the Maison d'Arrêt in the garden of the bishopric to pick the flowers in the spring to decorate the room that served as our chapel.

But he also liked to participate in chaplaincy meetings, to listen to the suffering, the cries of revolt, the abysmal questions posed by these people awaiting trial.

And I remember that at certain times, he left the chaplaincy room explaining that he was not only there for the guys who frequented the chaplaincy but for the others too.

And he went with the key of the chaplaincy to meet the prisoners whatever their religion, their origin or the offense committed in their cells.

He lived there on short visits where he could exercise his extraordinary ability to put himself within reach of people, to understand them and to show them this friendship which gave them confidence and which allowed him to hear so many confidences.

And he wasn't just being with it.

He also knew how to get wet and commit to contributing to the reintegration of guys coming out of prison.

He went so far as to open a few rooms on the second floor of the bishopric to accommodate men coming out of prison as part of the Pause café association.

It was not easy because one day he was called by a jeweler from Évreux to whom one of his hosts had tried to resell his pectoral cross which he had stolen from the bishopric.

He also carried this concern in partnership with associations such as Pause café, shelter, habitat, and humanism, the Catholic relief to contribute to this long journey of the obstacle represented by reintegration.

Finally, he never ceased to challenge all the Christian communities gathered in his diocese on their ability to open up to these distresses of the excluded and to implement concrete solidarity.

He said :

"Our Church lacks the poverty of risk.

What are our boldnesses now?

The Church is a servant when, in fact, she is on the side of immigrants, the unemployed, prisoners, the excluded, minorities...
Credibility obliges to be true in any situation.
When you do things, you can't cheat.
If the Church does not serve, it is useless."

Thank you, Jacques, for having served our diocesan Church by placing the poor at the heart of fraternal communion.
With you, we have understood that a Church can only be faithful to the Good News of Christ by being in close solidarity with all those whom the world neglects.